

Buying A Hot Russian Property

By Joyce Illig

NEW YORK—The worldwide English language rights to the memoirs of Natalya Reshetovskaya, the first wife of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, have been purchased by Bobbs-Merrill, which will publish the yet untitled book next February. It will be published in Moscow as "Arguing with Time" in October and has recently been sold for publication in Japan.

Anatoly Mkrtchian, head of Novosti Press Agency office in Washington offered the memoirs for sale for one week in the United States. On Friday, he signed the contract with Bobbs-Merrill for an advance described as "a fair amount" by Tom Gervasi, managing editor at Bobbs-Merrill.

Gervasi, who reads Russian, received the manuscript last Monday. He said he stayed up all night reading it and made his bid last Tuesday morning. Novosti had also offered the manuscript to Quadrangle, Doubleday, Macmillan and Intext.

Reshetovskaya is a chemist and teaches at the university in Moscow. She speaks some English and is free to come here to promote the publication of her book. The publisher plans to bring her here in February.

The book, according to Gervasi, is a memoir of Reshetovskaya's 30-year marriage to Solzhenitsyn which ended in 1969. They met in their late teens and she was a bride at 18. Gervasi described the tone of her text as "very persuasive" and said that the book is a psychological study of the man; he believes it is not an attempt to devalue Solzhenitsyn's reputation.

He said the author does make Solzhenitsyn appear to be an impossible human being at times and very egomaniacal. "The personality portrait is one you'll recognize," said Gervasi. "It's the story of a man who just couldn't keep it together. With everybody he met, insofar as she observed, he would become intensely involved and quite committed. Then after a short time, he would flare up and get angry and say he was betrayed. This was a pattern that worked with his professional associates, friends, everybody she knew him to be with.

"He just couldn't keep anything going, including his own marriage. Al-

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though it did go for 30 years, she believes that it was primarily due to her own efforts."

During World War II, Reshetovskaya got a special dispensation to visit Solzhenitsyn at the front. She writes of these times, and the book will include combat photographs that she took during this period. (She is said to be quite a good photographer and the publisher hopes to have many of her personal photographs in the book.)

According to Gervasi, the author states in the manuscript that she helped Solzhenitsyn transcribe part of "The Gulag Archipelago," Solzhenitsyn's just-published nonfiction account of the Soviet system of government terror as it operated from 1918 to 1956.

In her manuscript, Reshetovskaya states that eight years after Solzhenitsyn went to prison, she was divorced and remarried in 1952. A year later, she says, when Solzhenitsyn was released from prison, she divorced her second husband and remarried Solzhenitsyn.

There have been many reports of emotional as well as legal problems over the dissolution of their marriage. Solzhenitsyn has remarried. Reshetovskaya has not. "But I don't feel there are any sour grapes there," Gervasi said. "Of course, it could be an enormously careful job of acting cool and being fair, but really putting him down. I don't think though that she would have bothered to go to the lengths of saying some of the things she does say if that were the case. She really is pretty nice to him and she does obviously respect him a great deal."

Gervasi said the author had been writing the manuscript for two years and had completed it about six weeks ago. She kept diaries during the last 15 years of their marriage.

The publisher said it checked out the manuscript to make certain that Reshetovskaya wrote it and that it came through the proper channels. "There's no reason to think that she didn't write it," said Gervasi. "It seems genuine on an emotional and psychological level. The way in which it was presented and the way in which it got to us—right through to our negotiation—was done through normal sort of capitalistic channels."

Gervasi confirmed, however, that there is no reason to doubt that the Soviet government would consider it valuable to have the book published. "Solzhenitsyn has been a champion of freedom of speech," he said, "but the context in which he was a champion is within the context of great suppression by the Soviet government. Since the Soviet government is the one pointed at, obviously they would feel that by defaming Solzhenitsyn—if this book should do that, and I don't think it will—the result is that they come out a lit-

tle better. I think they are interested in seeing it published quickly because they think that will offset some bad publicity, which is nonsense. It shouldn't change anything, because the author says in her book that what Solzhenitsyn is fighting for is very good and quite valid.

"I don't think that she means the book to be an attack on Solzhenitsyn. I don't think the Soviet government would be displeased if the American public took it as an attack, but we're not going to present it as an attack."

Gervasi's conclusion is that it is not a political book. He refers to it as an intimate book. There are letters from Solzhenitsyn quoted verbatim in the manuscript. "The only problem about international copyright law is that we may have to modify that and have her paraphrase them," said Gervasi.

The manuscript is currently being planned as a 256-page book, having two eight-page inserts, retailing at \$6.95, with a first printing of 50,000 copies.

Reshetovskaya, Natalya

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